

SCAV Guide for Committees

Apartment Living and COVID 19

With the passing of the recent months, our knowledge of the COVID-19 virus has been increased during a period of heightened fear. What can also occur at the same time, is that the environment becomes familiar to us and we can become complacent. This may increase the challenges we face in protecting ourselves from the virus.

With this in mind, we also acknowledge that so many of us have faced additional challenges through this time of isolation, and as humans, through any time of change. We are therefore called upon to remain tolerant, considerate of others and to continue to act kindly towards each other, regardless of our circumstances. *We're all in this together.*

Particularly in an Owners Corporation (OC) setting, where we offer support and build a community with our neighbours. Extended relationships that many have come to rely on, or quite possibly could have been required to do so, during these uncertain times.

It truly is going to take us all, as a whole, to move out of this time with the greatest success rate. To do this the Government has enacted recent changes to the current restrictions. We are still required to work from home where-ever possible, although allowed now to go outdoors and visit community and public venues for extra activities, in limited capacities but with increasing numbers. Children have also recently returned to school.

The lifting of these further restrictions, to occur 22 June, therefore needs to be considered cautiously from two different aspects.

- One aspect being that we have the opportunity for life to return to 'normal'.
- The second, that for this to occur, we need to remain vigilant with our precautionary measures.

Following on in this Guide, is general advice that a Committee could consider when determining what the lighter restrictions means for their Owners Corporation Community. It will assist you better assess the risks, maintain activities that continue to protect safety of residents and communicate your activity effectively and positively.

Your Community will turn to you to find out just what these lifting restrictions mean to them in their lived environment; use of pools, gyms, gardens, lifts etc.

Before making any decisions though, it is essential to remember that COVID-19 is a respiratory disease spread between people in close contact with one another (1.8m or less) or through contaminated surfaces. It stands to reason then, that apartment buildings and other shared living spaces continue to pose the potential risk of community spread, should any resident, visitor or contractor to the site, have contracted the infection.

As your community moves out of lockdown, your building occupancy will once again be changing. Potentially lessening the impact on the building and its services but, increasing the risk of being exposed to the virus with more people now out and about, before returning home.

These circumstances will require the needs of, and risks to, the building and its community to be assessed on an ongoing basis. Particularly before any decisions are made to reduce any services already increased to the building; such as waste management and cleaning.

Remember you have duties under the Occupational Health & Safety Act to employees, contractors and others who are in your care.

Cleaning should increase, or continue at the already increased rate, for all high touch areas.

Physical distancing should also continue to limit the spread through all areas of common property.

Consideration may be given to the right time and best circumstances to re-open access to shared facilities. Committee's are encouraged to make informed decisions, that aim to balance the needs of the community with potential health risks. Aim to remove any liability of the OC and reduce the role the OC may play in increasing risks to its residents, so that we can come through this stage and move back to a healthier new type of normal.

Can we continue to remind residents of the risks?

Yes definitely, we're not through this yet. In fact advising residents of what the OC is doing to recognise them as part of the Community and what measures can be taken to protect their own health also notifies them of what their fellow residents are doing that protects them.

You may wish to put up posters on the common property, if you haven't already, to encourage and remind residents how to stop the spread of the virus. You can access these via the Department of Health. [Click here for these resources.](#)

Can we ask residents to disclose to the OC if they are self-quarantined or infected?

Remind residents now, for the safety of all, that they notify the Owners Corporation should they be in quarantine. While we would undoubtedly dislike being the one infected, and may feel at this point in time that it is a breach of our own personal privacy, notifying others may enable the support needed while you are unable to leave your apartment, example rubbish removal, delivery of food and goods etc. A cooperative community will also ensure that as a fellow resident, you are notified if someone else in your building has the virus and allow you to take extra precautions. So it works both ways.

More formally we note that Hall residents and their visitors are bound by the Model Rules as well as any Consolidated Rules. The Model Rules provide a duty under 1.1 and 6.1 to not cause a hazard or interfere with quiet enjoyment.

1.1 Health, safety and security of lot owners, occupiers of lots and others

A lot owner or occupier must not use the lot, or permit it to be used, so as to cause a hazard to the health, safety and security of an owner, occupier, or user of another lot.

6.1 Behaviour of owners, occupiers and invitees on common property

An owner or occupier of a lot must take all reasonable steps to ensure that guests of the owner or occupier do not behave in a manner likely to unreasonably interfere with the peaceful enjoyment of any other person entitled to use the common property.

What should we do if we are advised that someone is self-isolating or has contracted the infection?

If you are notified or become aware, you must keep the identity and specific location confidential and only disclose to parties that need to know. The parties that need to know are:

- Any contractors who service the site
this allows them to increase their own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols. They only need to know specific details if they are providing a behind the door service.
- The Owners Corporations Manager and Building Manager as applicable
They should be advised which apartment it is, in case something needs to be escalated.
- Residents
Place a notice on the bulletin board advising that a case has been reported do not provide private and confidential information. It can be a general notice, confirming the presence of a case and to adhere to published health guidelines.
- Affected Resident
Provide details to the resident concerned as to what they must do with respect to delivery, essential visitors, rubbish and any other property restrictions.

What should we do about complaints?

Enforcing the Rules is a Committee responsibility but during extreme circumstances such as these, where building occupancy will be at maximum and everyone living in close quarters a Committee should act reasonably and consider carefully practical solutions to keep community harmony.

Some Rule enforcement like drying the washing on the balcony, tolerance of “quiet enjoyment” and pets may need to be relaxed. Common sense should be used.

How many people can visit each apartment?

In line with the easing restrictions as at 22 June, 20 people can visit a home at any one time. This includes the people who live in the apartment.

The Committee may need to assess the frequency of cleaning of high touch areas with the potential for increased visitors to the building and use of lifts, intercoms, entranceways, door handles etc.

In order to manage risk, the Committee may consider additional entry requirements such as a sign in/sign out sheet and a declaration that they have not been in contact with any patrons or cluster sites from associated with COVID19.

How many people can use the lift at any given time?

Recent advice from Work Safe Australia has advised that restrictions may be reduced in the use of lifts in commercial buildings. Safe measures are still required, together with additional precautions and warnings necessary to not only advise users how to minimise risks, but to also ensure any additional risks arising out of its use or alternative ways to access the building, are also addressed. Including ways to deter people congregating outside lifts while waiting, signs for maximum numbers, access to hand sanitiser, potential trip hazards if using stairs, or the ability for those using emergency stairs to be locked in etc.

You can read more on these preventative measures and access instructional signage at Safe Work Australia.

With respect to residential premises', there remains a void on clear directives from Government. However, taking guidance from Safe Work Australia it remains prudent to include signs that remind residents to avoid physical contact to reduce the risk of spread as well as, address any potential risks from use of alternative means of access to and from the building.

The Committee can also consider use of hand sanitiser and/or alcohol wipes in these high touch areas.

Can we re-open our shared facilities, pool, spa, gymnasium?

Once again the directives provided to shared facilities and services offered within residential premises' remains void. It is not evident that the Government's advice that community centres, dining areas or pools may now open to limited numbers, directly relates to the use of the similar facilities within owners corporations.

Keep in mind that facilities accessed by the public are manned, whether it be by direct staff of the facility and/or contracted staff and have strict measures imposed on them during this stage of the restrictions. If an OC should choose to reopen its facilities it will need to consider and put protocols in place to guide its residents on the safe and compliant use at the time; i.e. in line with Government restrictions.

The OC will need to determine:

- How it will limit the number in attendance in the area at any given time?

No more than the maximum 20 people permitted by the current restrictions and dependent on the size of the space to allow for 1 person per 4 square metres.

- How it will maintain a register of users of the facilities/equipment?

Require all users to register their name, date and time of use.

This will enable the Health Department to notify all users to be notified if someone having contracted the virus can be traced back to having used the facility.

- What additional health precautions are to be put into place?

Requiring users to clean hands prior to entry and use of equipment, facilities

Requiring users to wipe down of seats, gym equipment etc before and immediately after use

Provision of hand sanitising location and/or alcohol wipes, including the point of entry and at location of register for pen use

- How it will communicate all these requirements and protocols to users

Signs in the area of the shared facility, using both text, images and varying languages

Notice Board bulletins

Correspondence, letter/newsletter to each apartment etc.

- What additional measures need to be taken by the OC?

Additional more frequent cleans of shared facilities and services, including toilets within these shared areas.

Can we now use our garden and bbq facilities?

The Government restrictions now permit gatherings of 20 people outdoors provided you maintain physical distancing by keeping at least 1.5 metres between you and the other person. If re-opening these areas to your residents, you should include protocols that will minimise risks.

Wiping down of any seats and tables before and after use, taking rubbish away. Should a time limit be imposed, or general advice to be considerate of others wanting to use the same space.

If using barbecue facilities the requirements may be more diligent, requiring use of the area to be pre-booked or recorded.

When communicating these protocols to the residents, remind them that these measures are to minimise risks and do not remove all risks. Use of the area is at a resident's own discretion and common sense and consideration of all is appreciated.

So, what does this all mean for you as the Committee?

The Committee is the designated representative of all the owners (and by default residents) that live in your development. You are responsible for the health and safety of your residents on behalf of the OC.

At this stage there remains very little published by the Health Department as to any specific obligations a building owner has when providing shelter to a person with or suspected to have COVID-19. However, the Government continues to maintain containment measures for social distancing as well as for non-essential services, non-essential businesses, venues and activities which impact pools and gyms, as well as cafes and food courts.

SCAV as the peak industry body for the strata industry has consulted with several professional organisations to develop this guide for Committees.

If you have a Building Manager request a copy of their Pandemic Management Plan.

If you do not have a Building Manager, you will together with your Owners Corporation manager (if applicable), need to develop your own Pandemic Management Plan, if you haven't already. To do this you will need to:

- Map your dependencies to understand where disruptions might impact your development. For example, greater parcel delivery, more visitors and impact of financial reserves.
- Review the preparedness of your critical third parties (Fire, Pool, Cleaning, Waste removal etc.) as these services may continue to be affected.
- Create a communication platform to keep residents informed. This could be as simple as a daily or weekly bulletin in the lobby or using technology platforms.
- Remain responsible for management of contractors visiting the site. You are advised to not directly approach contractors. Contractors will continue to be organised and instructed by your OC Manager via official work orders. It may continue to be necessary to delay non-essential work/activities on-site, however this will be done in consultation with the Committee as and when required.
- List the common areas most at risk for contamination and put in a management strategy for each area. For example, some things to think about are:

Risk Area	Risk Control	Action
GYM Surface Contamination Social Gathering	The gym may now be opened in compliance with Government enacted control phase protocols.	Consider the risks to your OC. If they are minimal you will need to determine and advise residents of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the re-opening times - the need to wipe down equipment before and after use - the limited number of people who may use this space at any given time (based on the 1 person per 4square metres. - the need to register their name & phone number - how and where these records will be held to maintain privacy. - remove contradictory signage and/or add new signage. - additional cleaning requirements - use of hand sanitisers, wipes etc. If you decide to keep the gym closed you should communicate this advice and address the following: Continue to restrict access to (lock off) the gymnasium to residents. Maintain the

		<p>signage that should already exist advising of the gym closure, thanking residents for their understanding.</p> <p>Notify residents of, and reasons for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - re-opening and protocols for use of equipment and space or - continued closure.
<p>POOL/SPA Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>The pool/spa/sauna may now be re-opened in compliance with Government enacted control phase protocols.</p>	<p>Consider the risks to your OC.</p> <p>If they are minimal you will need to determine and advise residents of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the re-opening times - the need to wipe down benches, seats etc. before and after use - the limited number of people who may use this space at any given time (based on the 1 person per 4square metres. - the need to register their name & phone number - how and where these records will be held to maintain privacy. - remove contradictory and/or add new signage. - additional cleaning required - use of hand sanitisers/wipes etc. <p>If you decide to keep the pool closed you should communicate this advice and address the following: Continue to restrict access to (i.e. lock off) the pool/spa/sauna area to all residents.</p> <p>Maintain signs to advise residents of the closure and thank them for their understanding.</p> <p>Notify residents of and reasons for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - re-opening and protocols for permitted use, or - continued closure.
<p>BBQ & COMMUNITY AREA Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Shared community areas such as gardens and barbecue areas may now be opened as</p>	<p>Consider increased risks in using these shared areas and increased cleaning protocols.</p>

	per Government enacted control phase.	<p>If you decide to permit access to these areas you will need to determine and advise of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the need to wipe down benches, seats, facilities etc. before and after use - the limited number of people who may use this space at any given time (based on the 1 person per 4square metres. - the need to register their name & phone number - how and where these records will be held to maintain privacy. - removal of any personal rubbish - remove contradictory and/or add new signage <p>Remove signs that advise area is out of use if reopening and/or add signage with new requirements. Or if remaining closed maintain signs to advise facility is closed.</p>
<p>SHARED OUTDOOR GARDEN AREA</p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p>	<p>Responsibility for users to maintain physical distancing and therefore restriction to the number of residents who may access the area at any one time.</p> <p>Seats and tables posing potential contamination risks.</p> <p>Social gatherings limited to 20 people</p>	<p>Provide a notice to residents that confirms that use of the garden area must comply with current Government restrictions. Being limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. Also that numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters).</p> <p>Also remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions.</p>
<p>TOILET & SHOWERS</p> <p>Surface Contamination</p> <p>Social Gathering</p>	<p>Consider if these facilities will be opened with increased cleaning schedule in line with Government enacted control phase.</p>	<p>Provide a notice to residents that confirms that use of the communal areas must comply with current Government restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. - numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters). - remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces

		<p>and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p>
<p>LIFT ACCESS Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Lifts to remain in operation with</p> <p>Increased cleaning schedule</p> <p>Users exercising physical distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high risk infection rate.</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement physical distancing requirements.</p>
<p>INTERCOM SYSTEM Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise physical distancing</p>	<p>Consider hand sanitizer in lobby, request in interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Recommend gloves be used.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime.</p>
<p>WASTE ROOMS and CHUTES Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise physical distancing</p>	<p>Install signage.</p> <p>Provide a notice to residents that confirms that use of the communal areas must comply with current Government restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. - numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters). - remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions. <p>Consider hand sanitizer in waste rooms, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high risk area.</p>

		<p>Encourage and educate as to the correct and efficient management of waste.</p> <p>Increase waste removal services if necessary to keep up with household waste while building may be in full occupancy.</p>
<p>LAUNDRY AREAS Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Mandatory hot wash</p>	<p>Provide a notice to residents that confirms that use of the communal areas must comply with current Government restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. - numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters). - remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions. <p>Maintain signs to wash their hands before and after using laundry facilities, to use detergent and hot water wash and recommend using the dryer to finish.</p> <p>Consider hand sanitizer in room, request for the interest of all that it not be removed.</p> <p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning regime to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate</p> <p>A booking system could be implemented to regulate numbers and maintain a record of use of the facilities.</p>
<p>FRONT DOOR Surface Contamination Social Gathering</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p> <p>Exercise social distancing</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange increased cleaning regime; to at least daily or more if high use and/or high infection rate.</p> <p>Encourage residents to implement physical distancing requirements.</p>

<p>DOOR HANDLES Surface Contamination</p>	<p>Increase cleaning schedule</p>	<p>Authorise and arrange additional cleaning to at least daily or more if a high use area with increased risk of infection rate.</p>
<p>VENTILATION/AIR CONDITIONING Airborne contaminants</p>	<p>Check if HEPA filters, consider upgrade if not</p>	<p>Review ventilation rates – increase fresh air rates if possible.</p>
<p>COMMITTEE MEETINGS Surface contaminants</p> <p>Social Gathering</p>	<p>Continue to postpone face-to-face committee meetings.</p> <p>Consider alternative means of communicating to make decisions.</p>	<p>Committee to comply with current Government restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. - numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters). - remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions. <p>Notify Committee members of the protocols established and request they comply.</p> <p>Consider alternative meeting solutions like Skype, ZOOM or telephone for discussion then use email ballots to capture decisions and create record.</p>
<p>GENERAL MEETINGS Surface contaminants</p> <p>Social Gathering</p>	<p>Consider alternative means of communication and decision making. Hold meetings virtually.</p>	<p>Meetings to comply with current Government restrictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to 20 people gathering at any one location. - numbers will be limited by the size of the area (accommodating the protocols of physical distancing 1 person per 4 square meters). - the need to register their name & phone number - remind residents to be mindful of the potential risks of contaminated surfaces and to wipe down before and after use, as well as wear gloves, masks as extra precautions. <p>Notify all lot owners of protocols established and request they comply.</p>

		Consider other solutions like Skype, ZOOM, Voting on-line platforms, postal ballots etc.
PLUMBING Surface contaminants	Use of substitute paper products as toilet paper eg Newspaper, tissues or serviettes is to be discouraged. Potential blockages, increasing health concerns and access to services	Convey concerns to all residents of potential problems and how it will impact them and ask them to comply. Notify contractors attending site, if there is positive case of COVID-19 in the building NB: There is a high risk to a plumber who must clear blocked sewer pipe.
CONTRACTORS Safe work-site	Responsibility to maintain a safe worksite when contractors are engaged to work on the common property. Maintain physical distancing from contractors working on site. Potential threat of coming into contact with the virus.	Committee to avoid contact or approaching trades persons when on site. Work orders to be issued by OC management company; continue to require Safe Work Method Statements, which will now include additional processes including PPE and physical distancing measures. Instruct all trades to operate as if someone with COVID-19 resides on site. If the OC is notified of a person who has tested positive to the virus all contractors must be notified.

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